**Act 1. (Software Review) (one of five evaluations of low-end accounting
   software) (Cougar Mountain Software) (evaluation)**

ABSTRACT: Cougar Mountain Software's $199.50 Act 1 7.22 is not outstanding
for ease of use, speed nor on the elegance of its user interface. The
product, however, offers high functionality at a good price. Among its
notable features are: customization of forms, strong invoicing, customer
statements, and available upgrades to Unix or a local area network.
Integrated in its basic package are: General Ledger, Accounts Payable,
Accounts Receivable, Order Entry/Invoicing, Inventory, Payroll Entry, Check
Reconciliation and Lynx, a product that imports or exports delimited ASCII
data files. Act 1 7.22 is suitable for businesses with more than basic
bookkeeping needs.
TEXT:
     Act 1 Cougar Moutain Software has come up with a package that does not
score high on glitz or ease of use for the first-time computer user. But
Act 1, sold for $199.50, makes up for its first impression by scoring high
on function and features.
     The basic package integrates General Ledger, Accounts Payable,
Accounts Receivable, Order Entry/Invoicing, Inventory, Payroll Entry, Check
Reconciliation, and Lynx (a product to import or export delimited ASCII
data files) into its single-user, batch-oriented accounting system. An
optional Job Cost module is available, as well as a module for Fund
accounting, at a cost of $199.50 each.
     Its documentation is well organized, and its installation procedures
are geared for user customization. On-line help consists of a reference
field on the screen that identifies the section in the module documentation
describing the options.
     Unfortunately, Act 1 does not have the full-screen edit capability of
many of the newer packages in which data entry is accomplished by moving
sequentially through the data fields. You can't simply back up if you need
to revise something. Instead, you have to specify the line number from a
command line at the bottom of the screen.
     When you're ready to set up Act 1, spend a little time going through
the brief tutorial to get a grasp of the package's basic features. Then
spend some more time with the documentation to understand how to establish
each module for your business. Lookup windows are available for some of the
date field options.
     The General Ledger, which follows a batch control approach, allows
for account codes of up to 15 characters and consolidates up to 30
companies into one entity.
     There are ten types of account codes, including contra accounts,
operating accounts, and nonledger accounts. The nonledger accounts can be
used for memo accounts as well as for statistics such as operating volume,
number of units sold, or other values that can be combined on custom
financial reports to yield more meaningful performance measurement.
     You may also import a delimited ASCII file to create a batch file for
editing and posting. An allocation processing function allows for recurring
or reversing transactions. Allocations can include a percent of an account
total, a fixed dollar amount, or a combination of the two.

Accounts payable monitors cash conservation. You can specify a default due date for each vendor, track mail float days by vendor, and maintain a "Days to Lose Discount" field that indicates for each vendor how many days past the original due date you will still take discounts.

ACT 1 uses general codes to save data entry time. Recurring expense codes can be used for selecting items to generate transactions based on payment frequency or other grouping. Allocation table codes are used for distributing expenses on invoices. You can specify up to ten check formats for each company by copying the default format and modifying for your specific needs.

Accounts Payable allows for printing 1099s and allows currency conversion during invoice processing. The Check Reconciliation module lets you reconcile both AP and Payroll checks.

Stock items and **new   vendors** can be **added** to the inventory master **file** during invoice entry. Cash basis accounting may be accomplished by selecting to expense invoices only when they are paid. This, combined with some additional procedures, allows a cash basis business to properly treat expenses. For example, in AR you can opt not to account for revenue until the cash is actually received.

Like the Accounts Payable module, the Accounts Receivable module handles cash discounts well, giving you the ability to tie discounts to the transaction date, a specific day in the month, or a number of days from the end of the month.

Transactions can also be established to record cash receipts not related to accounts receivable, such as cash sales. Prepaid and credit memos are easily handled. Each customer may have a billing and shipping address, but if your customer has multiple shipping addresses, you will need to over-type the address when shipping. Act 1 accommodates reports for collection monitoring and assigning receivables to factors.

Order Entry maintains support for point-of-sale terminals with cash drawers and allows up to six price levels, inventory returns, reserved inventory, and flexible statement formats. Statements and invoices may contain comment lines that are either saved to the history file or just printed on the statement. The combination of recurring invoices and noninventory line items works well for businesses that have service contracts.

Period closing tasks require sequentially choosing menu options and then updating the accounting period in the master profile. What the package lacks is a comprehensive administrator's report to show what period-end processing has been done for each module.

In addition to Sales Analysis reports, reports for inventory back order, back order allocation, and inventory reserve allow you to track current status on scarce, high-demand inventory.

Inventory costing methodologies include FIFO, LIFO, weighted average, and standard cost. Act is not designed to handle multiple warehouses. With the bill of materials function you can maintain inventory items that are combinations of other parts. Individual reports allow you to plan production, promotions, and analyze potential profit.

The newest module, Check Reconciliation, may be integrated with the General Ledger, Accounts Payable, and Payroll modules. The new module tracks cash for any number of bank accounts--reconciliation may be either from your books to the bank statement or from the statement to your books. You can choose to enter just the check number or the check and dollar amount. It handles statement reconciliation with deduction, deposits, bank charges, and interest. It can even handle recurring items, such as a fixed bank service charge. Transfers between accounts can be handled, and checks can be written from this module to supplement Payroll and Payable capabilities.

Lynx, a module designed to import and export data, is standard. You may wish to import master file date, such as a chart of accounts, customer or vendor records, or even inventory records, or import to update existing

records. (The Snow Report Writer ($294), a third-party package available with many higher-cost accounting systems, is now available for use with Act 1. This menu-driven report writer, which allows you to "paint" reports and save the use and added functionality.

Act 1 is a good accounting system for businesses with more than basic bookkeeping needs. Its ability to design formats for checks, invoices, and statements is a plus for initial implementation. The integration of check reconciliation and inventory are well implemented. The package's batch mode and data-entry methods furnish a controlled processing environment, but this makes for very slow accounting. If speed and ease of use are an issue for your company, then look elsewhere.

CAPTIONS: Act 1: suitability to task. (table); Fact file. (table)